3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OII7 Murngin OII7

took from the hive so much wax, bee bread (the pupae of bees) and honey that it filled one of the honey baskets. The place where the tree fell is now the fresh-water stream, Gurakawi, which runs into Trial Bay. [773*]

Again the brother and sister walked northwards, this time searching for the *dun* female wild honey, *lirawar*. Near Caledon Bay they again followed a bee to its hive and, after cutting down the tree, filled another honey basket. The depression made by the fallen tree has since become the Mandarauik River. Still searching for honey, the brother and sister saw many bees near Port Bradshaw but were unable to locate the hive, because the bees, instead of flying to and from their nest, were drinking at a spring. The next bee led them on a long journey from Caledon Bay, cross-country, to Cape Wilberforce, where the contents of a particularly large hive at Jarana, near Melville Bay, filled many baskets. Again, the tree they felled created a watercourse, this time the Wandarauri River.[78] [532]

As *Dijal* and *Neri-neri* were pounding the comb to extract the honey, the sound attracted the attention of a lizard-man. Seeing the brother and sister had collected so much honey, he asked for some and they willingly gave it to him. But as the lizard-man was eating the honey a fragment of stick caught in his throat, causing him to cough and almost choke. For a long time he tried unsuccessfully to extract the stick, then, in disgust, he changed himself into a blanket-lizard, *baltjira* (*Chamydosaurus kingii*). The aborigines say that the stick, now a thin bone, is still in the throat of the lizard. [825]

After that incident *Dijal* and *Neri-neri* went to a group of large caves near Melville Bay and started to cook the wild honey in a large bark dish.[79] While they were engaged in the task an ancestral man, *Walangini*, was cooking fish at Port Bradshaw. On seeing the large amount of honey the brother and sister were preparing he held up his fish to show what he was cooking, hoping that *Dijal* would offer him some honey in exchange. But *Dijal* insulted *Walangini* by saying that he did not want his fish; honey was much better food.

After the honey was cooked, *Dijal* and his sister went into the caves, where they have lived ever since. No aboriginal will go near the locality, for fear of *Dijal*, who would cripple him by breaking his legs with boomerangs, then spear but not kill him. *Dijal* would then put the wounded aboriginal in a bark dish, take him into his cave, pound his shins with a stone until they were bent like a boomerang, then starve him to death.

The spirit of such a man, unlike those of other aborigines, does not go to the aborigines' heaven, but lives in the forest until able to enter the body of some woman. When born that child will develop boomerang shins.[80] [775]

78. See engraved smoking pipe, Fig. 628. [222]

79. Some kinds of honey, when first taken from the hive, burn the throat. After this 'hot' honey, called *bilku*, is cooked by heating it for a while in a bark dish resting in the hot sand and ashes of the camp fire, it becomes much milder in flavour. Cooked honey is *balwara*. [552]

80. The shins of some aborigines are curved and flattened like a boomerang. This is caused by the tropical disease of yaws. [164]

5: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1934
OI17 Murngin OI17

of them are in a condition of perfect physical fitness, lithe and graceful in all their movements, and tireless in their own pursuits. 142

Various diseases, such as yaws, tropical ulcers, and ophthalmia, are frequently observed, while there are some cases of gangosa, granuloma, and leprosy. Epidemics of measles, influenza and whooping cough have upon occasion been carried through from the outer fringes of settlement, and have badly stricken these isolated tribes. 164 ●

These aborigines will survive an almost unbelievable amount of physical injury, but they quickly succumb to diseases of a general character, particularly to fevers and pulmonary complaints, against which no constitutional powers of resistance have been developed. Considerable medicinal use is made of a wide variety of herbs and plants, but most of their practices in this realm are crude and of little value. In many cases it is believed that, as magic has caused disease, so counteractive magic will heal. 755 757

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
OI17 Murngin OI17

any extent with the visitors, and Professor Lloyd Warner used such statements as a basis for his opinion that the Malay traders did not interfere with native women.[8] But the women themselves offer a different point of view, and so do the songs and stories which have survived to the present day. Men are often unwilling to admit that they themselves, or people of their group, were induced by threats or by liquor to barter their wives and daughters, or that they allowed them to go to the traders because of their ties of friendship and trading relations. Often they attempt to "cover up" the fact that certain people are half or part Macassan, by insisting that their light skin has a spiritual rather than a purely physical explanation. The women, however, are more candid, and many of the older ones among them openly regret the passing of the Indonesian traders. Such an apparent contradiction is not unusual in matters of this kind, when casual liaisons have been carried out over a long period and then brought suddenly to an end through pressure of external circumstances.

The contacts of these Baijini and Indonesian people may have influenced the temperament of the coastal Aborigines, for they are (broadly speaking) more hasty tempered and emotional than the southern and central Aborigines, given to aggressive displays of anger and elementary warfare. The physical effects, however, apart from the infusion of an alien strain in the Aboriginal stock, seem to have been negligible; their indulgence in alcoholic drinks appears to have had no effect upon their general well-being,[9] while venereal diseases are virtually unknown in this eastern region.[10] This contrasts with conditions at Goulburn Island and Oenpelli, in western Arnhem Land, where the prevalence of venereal diseases (especially gonorrhoea) seems to have led to a high incidence of sterility, and so to a declining birth rate. Western Arnhem Land Aborigines have a reputation of being sexually rather lax, whereas various writers have expressed the opinion that the eastern Arnhem Landers are less willing to trade their womenfolk and have consequently been better able to regulate their sexual relations with "outside" people. Actually this impression seems to have its origin in the fact that the sexual pattern of both societies shows certain differences. The one is

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
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177 resources and develop their own internal economy, the clans to
649 become more closely integrated and the group as a whole more
178 self-sufficient. They were no longer dependent primarily on export and import, spending a great deal of their time around the Macassan settlements. Such outside goods as did find their way into the society were soon absorbed. It is probable, too, that their womenfolk had far less sexual contact with Europeans and Japanese than with the Indonesian traders. There were never as many of these newcomers on the coast at one time as there had been Malays and Macassans, and the Aborigines were never on such intimate terms with them as they had been with their predecessors.

However, the growing intensity of Mission contact, and the presence during the war years of large numbers of European troops, seem to have destroyed the natives' resistance to alien infiltration. Soon the reaction set in — actually the culminative effect of long centuries of contact with peoples who were culturally and psychologically different to themselves; and the result was gradually increasing dependence on Europeans. The desire for new ideas, and for all the material benefits they could achieve, was accentuated: but these were to be obtained only at the expense of their own culture and ideology. Although in the past they had learnt much about the successful absorption of alien belief and practice, these latter years found them wanting in knowledge concerning the practical application of their experience to modern problems. The deviation between Aboriginal and European cultures was greater than that between Aboriginal and Macassan, so that the present day finds these people largely unprepared for the changes that are upon them. Important aspects of their traditional life are disappearing. Religious fervour for the "old gods" is weakening; law and order are becoming more and more a matter of external control; and general disillusionment, with increased sexual laxity, accentuates these features that accompany a period of transition.

1444 While the effects of long alien contact are only too apparent
insofar as the native culture is concerned, the direct physical
● 164 effects (excluding the effect of Asiatic and Indonesian strains on the Aboriginal stock) are few.[20] The fact that venereal disease are

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
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rare in this north-east region[27] seems hard to believe when we consider the extent of Asiatic, Indonesian and European contact, and the sexual intimacy of the Aboriginal women with members of all these groups. Physically, these people remain more or less intact,[28] and increasing sterility has not followed contact as it has at Goulburn Island in western Arnhem Land. But there is a danger today, with the growing association these natives have with the Goulburn Island people, with the "crew-boys" on Mission luggers, and with native and European men and women in Darwin, that venereal disease will be introduced and disseminated. Aboriginal attitudes toward medical attention often preclude an early treatment of such cases, and the disease is allowed to gain much ground before it can be controlled and eradicated.

A word may be said of depopulation in this region. The reasons for this are not the same as at Goulburn Island, or on the cattle stations in the central north-western area of the Northern Territory,[29] but may perhaps be found in the warlike habits of the eastern Arnhem Landers.[30] Constant feuding over a long period is said to have reduced especially the male population, and brought about the extinction or amalgamation of many clans. This warring propensity led to a surplus of women, and had a direct bearing on sexual behaviour. For example, large polygynous families were formed; and these are conventional even today. It was perhaps because of this that the Aborigines were more ready to allow the Macassans and Malays access to their womenfolk: possibly there would have been far more dissension between these people and the Indonesian traders had their social structure been primarily monogamous.

[pp. 26-176 not processed]

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
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Yirrkalla; and the Government patrol vessel *Kuru* has travelled at intervals along the coast. There is talk, too, of establishing a new Church Missionary Society Leper Station at Bickerton Island, near Groote, instead of sending local people in need of treatment away to the Channel Island Leprosarium in Darwin Harbour.

The natives are still receiving a fair amount of European contact, apart from the missionaries and Native Affairs' patrol officers. But this is quite unlike what they experienced before the War. There is not, as yet, the same economic exploitation once indulged in by Japanese and European traders. Arnhem Land has been closed to outside commercial undertakings, and there is a feeling today that the natives should be able themselves to exploit their land and marine products, and to develop industries which will be remunerative to themselves. But in such a plan there are many pitfalls. Recently, for example, European pearlers and trepangers have been permitted by the Administration a base at Truant Island, to the north-east of the English Company Islands, and to engage as employees a certain number of local natives. Crocodile shooters are creeping in too, slipping along the coast and down the tidal rivers. And the Aborigines are wondering, with mixed feelings, if this will be the thin edge of the wedge, and whether the old days will return.

From the verbal literature of the Aborigines and the written data of the Europeans we have been able to learn something of the colourful past of the Arnhem Land coast. The unknown has been pushed back to a time when the Great South Land of Australia was still unvisited by Dutch, Portuguese and other Europeans – a time when intercourse with the outside world was at a minimum and, according to local mythology, the great Spirit Beings moved about the land.

We have been concerned primarily with the Arnhem Landers as they were and as they are. The problems emerge themselves from our study; and with them – if we are to learn from mistakes of the past – some of their solutions. The stage is set for almost anything. The administration and the Missions have it in their power to implement a policy which will be of lasting benefit to

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113 [6] *Vide* R. and C. Berndt, Carved (Secular) Human figures of North-East Arnhem Land, *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 51, No. 2; and also A. P. Elkin, R. and C. Berndt, *Art in Arnhem Land*.

[7] Re notes by Dr Held and Professor Cense (University of Indonesia): communication and conversation with the former. *Vide* R. and C. Berndt, *Sexual Behaviour in Western Arnhem Land*, pp. 38-45.

[8] E.g., L. Warner, *op. cit.* p. 467.

[9] *Vide* L. Warner, *op. cit.* p. 457.

[10] *Vide* Report by Dr Strangman, who made a medical survey along the north and east coast of Arnhem Land in 1908, one year after the Indonesian traders ceased to visit these shores. (175/1908, Report on Condition of Aborigines, *Northern Territory Incoming Correspondence*, South Australian Archives.) This subject has been discussed briefly in *Sexual Behaviour in Western Arnhem Land* (R. and C. Berndt), pp. 43-45, where reference is made to the introduction of venereal disease into western Arnhem Land.

164 Dr Strangman examined eastern Arnhem Land Aborigines at Caledon Bay, Blue Mud Bay and Cape Shields, and found no evidence of venereal disease. On Groote Eylandt he "could see little evidence of venereal or other disease; a few natives had genital or inguinal sores covered with soft granulation tissue which projected above the skin surface (pseudo granulomata)". "These growths", he adds, "are either a local infection or the result of broken down inguinal glands, which have a tendency to heal spontaneously with improved health when the affected natives migrate to better country with abundant food".

[11] M. Flinders, *op. cit.* pp. 228-233.

113 [12] E.g., A. Grenfell-Price, The History and Problems of the Northern Territory, *The John Murtagh Macrossan Lectures*, 1930, Adelaide 1930, p. 2.

[13] *Vide* R. Berndt, Badu, Islands of the Spirits, *Oceania*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, pp. 93-103, and A. P. Elkin, R. and C. Berndt, *Art in Arnhem Land*.

[14] *Vide* P. P. King, *Narrative of a Survey of the Intertropical and Western Coasts of Australia, etc.*, London 1826; T. B. Wilson, *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World*, etc., London 1835; G. W. Earl, Notes on Northern Australia and Neighbouring Seas, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 1837, Vol. XII, pp. 139-41; G. W. Earl, *Enterprise in Tropical Australia*, London 1846; J. L. Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia, with an account of the coasts and rivers explored and surveyed during the voyage of H.M.S. Beagle . . .* London 1846; A. C. Gregory, North Australian Expedition, *South Australian Parliamentary Paper* No. 170 of 1861; F. A. Oppen, *A Description of the Northern Territory of South Australia*, 1864; F. Carrington, The Rivers of the Northern Territory, *Proclamation of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia (South Australian Branch)*, 1886-87, pp. 55-76; D. Lindsay, An Expedition Across Australia . . . *Journal*

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
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few indeed and, with the exception of the dugout (canoe) complex, have had no significant influence on the development of Murngin civilisation. On the other hand, when an examination is made of the even larger number of traits found in Malay culture, and they are contrasted with the very few adopted by the Murngin from the Malays, it becomes even further demonstrable that Murngin civilisation remained very near to what is was before the Malay arrived, and that the Malay gave little of his own civilisation to Aboriginal Australia". Just how Professor Warner arrived at this conclusion, with so much evidence pointing in the opposite direction, is beside the point in this study; and we shall not linger here in discussion of his statements.

[27] No cases were mentioned by Dr Strangman (*op. cit.*), nor directly from this area by Dr Thomson. The latter mentions the danger of the introduction of such diseases from the East (by Japanese), but not specifically their occurrence in this region. (*Vide Report on Expedition to Arnhem Land*, 1936-37, Commonwealth of Australia, 1939, p. 15 and p. 16.) See also R. and C. Berndt, *Sexual Behaviour in Western Arnhem Land.*

[28] There is, of course, the incidence of leprosy, yaws, tropical ulcers, etc., and the prevalence of such epidemics as measles, whooping cough, influenza, common colds and so on. The Aborigines have little or no immunity to such introduced diseases. (See also Thomson, *op. cit.* pp. 16-17.)

[29] *Vide* R. and C. Berndt, *Native Labour and Welfare in the Northern Territory*, duplicated manuscript for private distribution, Sydney 1946, pp. 68-71, 92-98, 100-102, 153-165, and 289-294.

[30] *Vide* L. Warner, *op. cit.* pp. 155-190. Professor Warner mentions (pp. 155-6), ". . . polygyny is possible under present conditions only because of warfare, and the resultant scarcity of women". The first part of this statement holds good for north-eastern Arnhem Land; but in the region from Arnhem Bay to Blue Mud Bay it was chiefly the male population which diminished as a result of warfare. Only occasionally were women speared. A detailed study of depopulation in relation to warfare, and its bearing on family life and sexual behaviour will be given later: see, for example, R. Berndt, *Love Songs of Arnhem Land.*

Dr Thomson (*Interim General Report of Preliminary Expedition to Arnhem Land, Northern Territory of Australia*, 1935-36, Department of Interior, Canberra, 1936, pp. 42-44, and *Report on Expedition to Arnhem Land*, 1936-37, Commonwealth of Australia, 1939, pp. 6-15, 16 and 18) has mentioned the subject of depopulation in this region. His contention is that alien contact (principally Japanese and European), the breaking down of traditional ways, and the collapse of clan structure, together with introduced epidemics, have diminished the native population of this region.

[pp. 212 – 227 not processed]

11: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1933 OI17 Murngin OI17

[P. 91]

ABORIGINAL MEDICAL PRACTICE IN EAST ARNHEM LAND

By T. THEODOR WEBB[1]

AS would naturally be expected among so primitive a people as the aborigines of East Arnhem Land the operation of magic, both in causing and in relieving sickness, is largely believed in. Apart from this, however, there is found the fairly extensive use of certain vegetable products which are at least believed to be of medicinal value.[2] In some cases the treatment consists of a combination of magic and the administration of medicine. Moreover, where medical treatment proves non-effective one may always fall back on evil magic as the explanation of failure.

One of the complaints from which these people frequently suffer is muscular rheumatism, particularly in the lumbar region. In such a case, should there be a *marrngit*, magician, in the neighbourhood, his aid will be sought, and he operates in the following way. Presuming the patient is suffering from backache, the *marrngit* has him lie face downward in the sand, and then proceeds to feel carefully all over his back. He then arises, breaks off a small leafy branch and dances round the patient, swishing vigorously with the branch. Presently he dashes away to a considerable distance as though in pursuit of something, and still swishing his branch. This is done to drive off the evil spirit which is responsible for the man's condition and which the *marrngit* alone is able to see. Having accomplished this purpose he returns to the patient. He now selects one spot on the man's back, which he presses and kneads thoroughly, after which he massages the surrounding area, working all the time toward

[1] Chairman of the North Australia District of the Methodist Missionary Society of Australia. A previous article, "Tribal Organization in Eastern Arnhem Land," by Mr. Webb was published in *Oceania*, III, No. 4.

[2] Unfortunately I am not a botanist, nor have I been able to discover any literature which might enable me to identify many of the trees and plants used and which are peculiar to these northern regions.

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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141 516 in front of him, and in this position his knee-cap is on a level with his chin. Another habit, dependent on long shins and as common as the white man's hands-on-hips, is to stand on one leg with the other drawn up so that its foot rests above the other knee-cap. Anyone can laboriously do the trick but only a long-shinned aboriginal would find it comfortable.

142 Corpulence is not found in Arnhem Land, for Yulengor have little opportunity to put on weight where food is scarce, poorly balanced, and mostly roughage. Women spend most of their time hunting, and frequently travel twenty or thirty miles a day in their search for food. By carrying huge loads on their heads they acquire a unique poise and graceful carriage unknown elsewhere.

[462-482]

Men seem to have short necks, but this is due to chests being so well developed that they give the impression of being deliberately thrown out and upward. Back and pectoral muscles ripple the skin and the whole body tapers sharply.

Aboriginal hair is dark to black in colour, though on children's heads the tips are frequently bleached a reddish-brown. It is wavy and curly, but never fuzzy, and is fine in texture rather than coarse.

Eyes are set deep under beetling brows; pupils are smoky blue-black, and the rest of the eye is definitely not white, but rather veiled and blotched a yellow pastel shade. Finely chiselled ears lie close to the skull in both young and old; the nose, though deeply cut away between the eyes and uniformly broad, cannot be termed flat.

Aboriginal teeth are strong and well formed, and are astoundingly effective in snipping through bush rope, holding and straightening a spear in a vice-like grip, and masticating tough meat and fibrous foods. Teeth give little trouble and most of them are retained for life, even if worn down to the gums.

[164]

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YULENGOR

484 I was awakened by the trilling of a butcher bird, and as the sun tipped the motionless trees we resumed our journey through dew-laden grass. No food had been saved from the night before and sharp eyes were on the look-out for something to eat, but it was not till about ten o'clock that the women cooeed and a halt was made to cook an opossum and two goannas.

The day was uneventful and at sundown we came to a deep crocodile-infested creek about a quarter of a mile wide. As there were no canoes about, I wondered how the crossing [481] was to be made, but without hesitation several youths waded in and swam over with their spears. This is the way all the men would have crossed, but Jirring suggested that he and I wait with my medical equipment and camera till his wives and children arrived with their food and family possessions. [501] They were prepared for the crossing, and had sheets of paper-bark which they stacked in heaps on the water, driving digging-sticks through each stack to hold them together. Small children and bundles of food were then piled on top, older children clung to the sides, and a woman swam beside each pile as she pushed it to the other side. Medicines, camera, and swag were successfully shipped in the same way. Such crossings, with yelping dogs, shrilling women, and squealing children, apparently scare away hungry crocodiles, for they seldom attack, although on this occasion several glided off the mud into the stream as we approached. At dusk we came to the camp of a Blue Mud Bay horde, some distance from the river.

[497] [64] I spent several days in this camp with Yulengor I had not seen before, and was able to treat wounds and ulcers and give hypodermic injections for yaws and gangosa. By day 484 the men stayed under leafy bough shelters, talking, sleeping, 512 and preparing totemic emblems with intricate and artistic 462 designs. Women went food-gathering, and at sundown arrived with loads of firewood and dilly-bags bulging with

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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Old men sometimes demand a further treatment of the food, and the partly cooked damper is then kneaded into a wide, thin layer and rolled into bark before being re-baked. By this final process the 'ngutu' becomes impregnated by tabu, and only fully initiated males may eat it. I have seen men delirious in the cycad season; though not showing other ill effects, they do not recover for several weeks. Kuninyal suffered in this way, and I remember he was the sport of the camp and became thin and haggard through not being able to hunt for himself. It was openly stated that he had been eating half-cooked cycad cakes.

Many nuts, berries, and fruits are found in the bush, but they are not very enticing. Some are as large as cherries, but the majority are the size of currants. Wild cashew nuts, ripening at the end of the dry season, are the most favoured of all. Small bright red and orange cashew fruit are attached to kidney-shaped brown nuts which are full of prussic acid. A thick skin on the nut also contains acid, and it is roasted to extract the kernel, which tastes like a tiny potato with a peanut flavour. In the roasting process, acid spurts from the fire, and fumes in the smoke severely burn anyone near by. Children develop scaly blisters, and women tending the cooking fires receive extensive burns.

'Larrani' trees, with their grey branches and large green waxy leaves, make a gay sight when they are loaded with bunches of ripe red fruit. The fruit looks like red apples, but they have large woody kernels and very little flesh. Large quantities are gathered, and hunters use them to slake their thirst; but I must confess to finding that their astringency only increased my desire for water.

Another popular fruit comes from the beautiful East Indian tamarind tree, which thrives and bears prolifically around old Macassar watering-places. The seed pods are filled with a pleasant acidulous brown pulp which can be stored, but nomads strip the trees and eat the fruit long before it is ripe.

755 collecting shellfish, and to cure the child he had pummelled the stomach, subduing the parasite and sucking it out in an invisible form.

[164] A persistent epidemic of dysentery was making its way through the Yirrkala camp, and in desperation I finally dosed the two hundred occupants with castor oil, had all shelters burnt and a new camp made on the opposite side of the creek. There were no further applications for medicine, which suggested that everyone had recovered, and upon inquiry I was complacently told that there could be no further sickness, for on the night following the castor oil episode, the marrnggit had conducted a magical 'sing' and had put a spell on the mischievous spirit that had caused the trouble.

164 152 Aboriginal stamina in privation and suffering is proverbial, and the wounded exhibit stoicism and endurance beyond belief. Usually the only indication of suffering is in the flexing of muscles and the rolling of the head. Internal complaints, pains, and epidemics are much more likely to prove fatal, for they cannot be seen as can an open wound.

753 Imagination plays a big part with internal troubles, and the victim, thinking he is under an evil spell, prepares to die.

825 Yulengor have great fear of venomous snakes, and to show their contempt for non-venomous and edible varieties they insert the head upside down between their teeth and dislocate the vertebrae by jerking down with their hands. In Arnhem Land there are two varieties of venomous brown snakes in addition to the death-adder; although they are not as numerous as might be expected, they are by no means uncommon. One afternoon when I was burning a fire-break round an eight-acre paddock I killed seven death-adders.

752 755 825 Snake-bite can only be treated by first capturing the snake. A forked stick is held behind its head and is later replaced by the string by which it is suspended from a tree. On no account must the snake be killed, for if it is even injured the

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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out it is assumed to be worth while patching him up; his organs are pushed inside and the hot spear-thrower, bark-pulp, and clay-plaster treatment is applied.

Severe constipation, with distended stomach, is known as 'or wah', and for this the leaves of a dry jungle tree are mixed in water and the fluid rubbed over the body. Crushed leaves are inserted in the nostrils and piled on the chest whilst the remaining fluid is poured into the ears. It is said to be essential for the patient to remain supine, so as to allow the fluid to run from the nostrils and ears down through the spinal column into the stomach. A second method is to make a meal from a long, spiral shellfish (*Cerithieder Telescopium telescopian*) found on the mudflats. It is good food at any time, but it is also regarded as a cure for constipation, in aiding the passage of fibrous foods; it has the smoothness of the oyster and looks like glutinous slime.

A third treatment is carried out by building a low platform of sticks, covering it with swamp grass, placing the patient on top and covering him with sheets of paper-bark. A fire is made under the structure from the wood, leaves, and bark of the 'boit' or iron-wood tree. This particular tree is always used for the fire. (It is the hardest wood I have seen, and when it is being milled severe irritation is caused to both nose and throat.) The patient spends most of the day on the grille, and from time to time is turned over; at sundown he is removed and plunged into a nearby creek or waterhole. Most assuredly he can expect to feel stimulated.

Diarrhoea is not a common ailment, for natural wandering habits reduce the danger of infection. Nevertheless, epidemics do occur, maybe through over-eating a good catch of turtle, or through hunger driving the food-gatherers to eat decomposing fish or meat washed ashore. A succulent herb, 'brokpili', found near fresh water swamps, is then crushed and mixed with water, and the rusty red mixture

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754 several women and children were dead; other sufferers were retching, and rolling on the beach in agony.

When an epidemic of whooping cough from Darwin swept eastwards through Arnhem Land and caused many deaths, [164] a horde on the Crocodile Islands explained that an enemy [776] had released the curse from a tree containing the spirit of the common cough. By stripping the bark from the tree he uncovered the evil spirit and sent it to the camps of his enemies to afflict them. On the other hand he could have broken up the tree, burnt it, and sent the smoke to blow over them.

754 753 789 825 [776] Old Manimba, lame and half-blind, was familiar with magical arts and an acknowledged rain-maker. He also claimed to have control over mosquitoes and boils. Spirits of both plagues inhabit the pandanus palm, and when these prickly fronds drop off in the wet season the mosquito and boil spirits are released to swarm over the land. Manimba usually gets what he wants by threatening to send some sort of plague. To rouse unseasonal mosquitoes he pulls a green pandanus frond and instructs its mosquito-spirit to swarm into the country of his enemies, and it is done. He can call up boils by making a fire under the palm and directing the smoke to blow over and inflict certain camps.

754 761 787 [775] [756] Death in any but the very young or old is attributed to evil magic and the first consideration is to fix the blame, for someone must die for it. When a man is killed his lesser spirit follows the killer. Marrngeit, or benevolent witch-doctors, claim to be able to see these enslaved ghosts, and they are called on for an opinion. They sometimes make startling revelations to the relatives, though not always without serving their own ends. I remember one marrngeit acted on his own initiative, and asked the relatives: 'Do you know why your brother died?' And when interest and suspicion were fully aroused, he continued, 'I have seen his "mali". It is following Jimunboi, and he must